

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH ADMIRAL LARRY RICE, DIRECTOR,
CHIEF OF NAVAL OPERATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL READINESS DIVISION MODERATOR: JENNIFER
CRAGG TIME: 1:00 P.M. EDT DATE: TUESDAY, JUNE 24, 2008

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MS. CRAGG: So with that, on today's DOD Bloggers Roundtable we are
pleased to have our guest speaker Admiral Larry Rice. He's the director the
chief of Naval Operations Environment Readiness Division. Sir, I'll turn it over
to you if you want to open with an opening statement.

ADM. RICE: You know, I'm going to go ahead and let Tracy start.

MS. CRAGG: (Inaudible.) Go ahead Tracy.

TRACEY MORIARTY (public affairs officer, Chief of Naval Operations
Environmental Readiness Division): Hi everybody, I'm Tracey Moriarty. I'm the
public affairs officer for the chief of Naval Operations Environmental Readiness
Division; and of course as you know I have with my boss, Rear Admiral Rice,
Larry Rice the director of the Chief Naval Operations Environmental Readiness
Division. The Navy's Environmental Readiness Division, as you know, is located
in Arlington, Virginia and it's responsible for leading the Navy's environmental
programs. Okay, Admiral.

ADM. RICE: Hi, I'm Larry Rice; I'm the director of environmental
readiness. I welcome the opportunity to answer any questions you may have about
the Navy's position regarding the Supreme Court's recent announcement yesterday.
This announcement, of course, to accept our request to review the lower court
rulings that restrict the Navy's use of sonar in training exercise off the coast
of Southern California. So, with that, over to you all.

MS. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. We going to go ahead and start with Grim.
He was the first one online. He's from Blackfive.net. Grim, please go ahead.

Q Yes, Admiral. I would like to know, I've been watching this
issue to some degree since 2003.

ADM. RICE: Can you speak up please?

Q Certainly. I say, I have been aware of this issue since 2003 or
so when we first started seeing court rulings on the subject. I notice a lot of
your opposition in the courts is coming from international NGOs, and I'm
wondering to what degree you think they might be motivated by environmental
concerns and to what degree they may be motivated by a desire to restrain U.S.
military's operations.

ADM. RICE: You may be seeing press articles from international NGOs but the folks that have taken us to task in both California and Hawaii are national NGOs. I wouldn't certainly want to comment on their motives.

MS. CRAGG: Grim, do you have some more follow up questions? You can go ahead and we can --

Q -- talking at cross-purposes then because I've been watching court cases on the subject in Europe as well as in the United States. So, I -- you may be looking at the issue from a different perspective and I don't have anything to follow up with.

ADM. RICE: Okay, I think I understand what you're saying now. The folks that are suing the U.S. Navy are national NGOs. There are a number of international NGOs that are suing other navies or bringing them task. You may have seen a recent article over in Great Britain about some dolphins that had stranded and the number of NGOs were pressuring the Royal Navy to stop using sonar training. Over in the Mediterranean, there are a number of international NGOs that have pressured NATO to stop using sonar in their exercises. Is that what you're asking? Q Yes. To what degree are --- usually these various NGOs are -- tend to be, because they are nongovernmental, they tend to draw money from a lot of places that tend to draw membership from a lot of places. Though I'm curious as to what degree you think there might be. You know is there somewhere pressure on China or others who may, Japan that may, or is it rally NATO, the United States, the E.U., U.K. Are we looking at a movement that may be partially motivated by an attempt to restrain U.S. military alliances? Or, are we looking mostly at people who are genuinely interested only in environmental matters?

ADM. RICE: Again, I don't want to talk about NGOs motivations. I will tell you that NRDC who is the National Resource Defense Council who's suing us in Southern California. Whenever they settle with the Navy and Navy ends up paying their lawyers fees, their membership base grows dramatically, so I'm assuming that has something to do with it.

Q Very well. I yield to the next call in.

MS. CRAGG: Okay. Before I go on to Eagle. Someone joined us. Who is joining us, please?

Q Colin Clark at DOD Buzz.

MS. CRAGG: Thank you Colin Clark. You will be number three on the list. So Eagle One, go ahead with your questions please.

Q Good afternoon, Admiral.

ADM. RICE: Good afternoon.

Q I look at the NRDC sites and their allegations against the Navy. It looks like their contending that they're not trying to completely shut down the Navy's use of sonar. They just want it very restricted. Is there a compromise position how -- you know I'm guessing, I'm looking -- I'm a little fuzzy on what the Supreme Court is going to decide on the basis of the appellate decisions on whether there's no restrictions or if the Defense needs of the military over- triumph the needs of the whales. But have there been discussions

within NRDC about what their limitations are? I know the Navy's got a pretty extensive list of things they're supposed to look for before they do any testing?

ADM. RICE: Umm --

Q Is there a coherent question somewhere in there?

ADM. RICE: I'm trying to figure out exactly what you're asking me.

Q Well, they claim they're not trying to totally shut down the Navy's use of sonar in certain circumstances. They just want it restricted. And I guess I'm asking what are the differences between the restrictions they are trying to impose and what the Navy has already imposed on it?

ADM. RICE: Okay, what they claim is that the Navy refuses to abide by, I believe their phrase is "common sense mitigation measures."

Q And I don't know if you know if you're familiar with all the different items that they're claiming that we need to do but we already employ 29 protective measures and, oh by the way, since we've been employing those protective measures, there have been zero strandings associated with Navy sonar despite a number of NGOs attempts to pin them on Navy. When you go to their website, you don't see any in the last couple years, and that's when we've been using these 29 protective measures. So, the Navy's position is those 29 protective measures are working. Any measures on top of that all they do is restrict training. If we complied with everything that NRDC wanted us to do, we would have saved absolutely zero marine mammals in the last two years. So that's my goal and imposition. What they'd like us to do are what you see -- now I think they're quite happy with the court's rulings in Southern California as well as Hawaii. What that does is it expands the shutdown zone that we currently use of 200 yards by a factor of 11 to 2,200 yards. Outside of a mile is when they'd like us to shut down sonar when we see a marine mammal. Our 200 yards is based on a number of scientific experiments that were performed on dolphins and belugas out in San Diego. The 2,200 yard number that the court is using isn't based on anything. And if you look at the court records from both Hawaii and San Diego, you'll note that the original ruling in Hawaii uses numbers that are completely different from what they used, the court used in San Diego. And again, that's because they aren't based on anything, just a whim of the court rather than scientific experiments.

Q Well, I gather you have an opinion on that there, sir. To follow up slightly, most of the concern that the Navy has seems to be with littoral waters and having has some experience in that as an insurer undersea warfare world, the problem seems to be these ultra-quiet diesel or AIP submarines that are not deep water capable. Is there any other -- are there alternative technologies that you can discuss that might further mitigate this alleged damage that NRDC is concerned about?

ADM. RICE: Sure. I will say that over the last -- we ran the numbers and over the last five years, the Navy has spent over \$100 million on, what I will call, marine mammal research. Included in that research is alternative technologies to finding submarines. And that includes different sonar wave forms. If you talk to some of the scientists, they will tell you that it may not be the sound level of sonar but what sonar sounds like, i.e. a predator to some of the marine mammals. So we're investigating alternative sonar waves.

Additionally, more or new technologies to find submarines besides sound. And that's about all I can talk about on that.

Q Okay, now if I may follow up with one more. The NRDC makes a big deal about the beaching of some beaked whales off the, what is Bahama or Bermuda, I guess it was Bahamas.

ADM. RICE: Bahamas.

Q The Navy seems to say, yes, that could have been one of our problems that was due to a variety of factors. Are there other instances of beaked whales that we've seen that are potentially a problem? I mean that was what, in 2000?

ADM. RICE: Thank was 2000. That was March of 2000. So again, eight years ago. And let me talk about that event for one second. Because that will tell you that, that was a seminal event for the Navy because it was -- that stranding, when we realized that sonar, under certain conditions had an effect of beaked whales. And those conditions are, a large number of ships using sonar over a long period of time and with a very strong surface duct. And for those of you who don't know what that means, it's a stratification of the water that allow sound to travel further. But the big thing down in that area was the -- (inaudible). In other words there was kind of like a box canyon where we were doing this and there were no escape routes for the whales to flee, so they ended up on the beach.

Just 40 miles south of there is our undersea range known as AUTEC and since the Bahamas stranding in 2000 we run a submarine commander's course down there every other month -- so we've been doing six exercises a year since 2000 in the presence of beaked whales with Navy sonar and haven't seen any strandings.

So it's not just you turn sonar on and instantly all the whales head for the beach, there have to be very specific circumstances present.

We saw those circumstances in the Northwest Providence Channel in the Bahamas; we've also seen them in the Canaries, in Greece and in Madeira, Spain -- our other ones where we know that mid-frequency active sonar was a contributor to some beaked whale strandings. And that wasn't necessarily U.S. sonar in all those locations but --

Q Yes, yes, sir.

ADM. RICE: Right.

Q Thank you, sir.

MS. CRAGG: Okay, sir, Colin Clark (sp) had joined us a little bit ago. So, Colin (sp), do you want to go ahead with your first question please?

Q The only thing I can think of, sir, is to ask, basically, is it required to do these tests in areas when whales are there?

And that's -- I know some of these species are migratory and some aren't -- I'm just wondering if there are ways around this?

ADM. RICE: That's a great question and I'll tell you that every time I go and speak to a group I get some version of that question. And here's what we know -- we have in the AUTEK range that I just mentioned in the Bahamas --

Q Right.

ADM. RICE: As well as the score range off of the western coast of San Clemente Island, just off Southern California, we have -- and out in Hawaii at Barking Sands, we have underwater -- instrumented underwater ranges and the ocean floor is covered with hydrophones -- microphones that have --

Q I've been diving out there --

ADM. RICE: Pardon me?

Q I've been diving out there.

ADM. RICE: Okay.

You haven't seen any of our hydrophones, have you?

Q Ah, no.

ADM. RICE: Okay. They're pretty deep.

And what we do with them, obviously, is we listen for submarines and it allows us to do ASW reconstruction following an exercise.

After the Bahamas in 2000 we realized that, hey, what do you know, we can also hear marine mammals with these hydrophones. So we listened -- actually the computers listened because beaked whales vocalize in frequencies above what you and I can hear.

Q Right.

ADM. RICE: So the computer listens for these beaked whales -- and in Southern California we can hear all kinds of different marine life, as you can imagine.

And what we found is when we're doing exercises, the animals are there. And when we're using sonar, the animals are there. In the case of beaked whales, lots of times they'll leave the area and as soon as the sonar stops, they'll come back.

So I would tell you that I'm not so concerned about not doing it where the animals are because that would essentially end training in Southern California because the marine mammals are all over the place out there.

Q That's what I figured but --

ADM. RICE: But what we're trying to do in -- with all this money we're spending on research -- and again, let me emphasize, that's Navy-funded research, not Navy doing the research.

Q Right.

ADM. RICE: The research is done by -- (inaudible) -- by Duke University, University of Hawaii, a bunch of institutions -- anyway, what we're trying to show is that this urban legend that when you turn sonar on, it drives all the marine mammals crazy, in fact isn't true. And all the Destroyer, Cruiser and Frigate commanding officers will tell you, when they turn sonar on, all the dolphins head their way and started bow surfing.

Q Well, that was my experience on a Destroyer so --

ADM. RICE: Yep.

Q The answer then.

ADM. RICE: I don't know if that answers your question or not but --

Q It does.

MS. CRAGG: Before I go back to all the other bloggers on the call, sir -- (inaudible) -- couldn't make today's call --

ADM. RICE: Okay.

MS. CRAGG: But he listed -- or he sent to me some questions that I want to go ahead and ask for him so that he can get them after the call.

ADM. RICE: Okay.

MS. CRAGG: Okay.

There're four of them so I'll get to the other bloggers, so don't worry, we have plenty of time.

The first one -- what in laymen's terms is at the route of the issue here -- why is the use of midrange frequency sonar a problem now and not 15 or 10 years ago? ADM. RICE: Part of that I think I've already answered and that 10 or 15 years ago nobody thought that sonar did anything to marine mammals -- or if they did, they weren't very vocal. Following the Bahamas in 2000, we realized there was an issue and the Navy, frankly, was slow to respond.

Once we finally came up with the environmental assessments that we did -- and lately as I mentioned, it was the 29 protective measures developed in accordance -- in conjunction with the National Marine Fisheries Service that has the Navy being what it used to be which is a great steward of the environment.

MS. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

And the second question is -- and forgive me if you've answered part of them already, I just want to make sure -- (inaudible) -- knows that I asked his question -- the next one is, what steps is the Navy already taking to mitigate the issue -- and I know you kind of went into the 29 mitigation but if you want to go and explain that again?

ADM. RICE: Right. In addition, the 29 measures are things that we employ every time we use sonar. And they are -- (inaudible) -- looking through what we call big eyes which are big binoculars; they use infrared and low vision devices when the visibility's not as good as it should be. Additionally, we use what we call PMAP, Protective Measures Assessment Protocol and that's a planning

tool essentially to prevent another Bahamas. The commanding officers of the ships go out, even if they're going out by themselves to use sonar, they'll use this PMAP, the protocol to make sure that they are not recreating the conditions that we saw in the Bahamas. So there's a number of things that we do to prepare for that. In addition, before a large exercise we'll do all kinds of aerial monitoring, looking for big whales that may be in the way of the exercise and have the ability to adjust that on the fly.

Q If I may, sir, it's Colin Clark (sp).

MS. CRAGG: Go ahead, Colin (sp).

Q I know that in the past we shared with scientists some of the data from the microphones in the North Sea and all that -- are you sharing data about the marine mammals with the scientific organizations -- is that part of the research?

ADM. RICE: Absolutely.

As a matter of fact, the folks that monitor that are the Naval Undersea Warfare Center up in Newport, Rhode Island. However, anybody at any time can log onto that website that has a password and see the animal activity. We've had a lot of scientists involved, doing that saying, hey, Navy -- what's the best way to say this -- they kind of give us helpful hints and suggestions on projects that we could do that would help them answer unknown questions about the marine mammal behavior in the presence of sonar.

Q Interesting.

So both sides are -- well, at least two sides are talking on this.

ADM. RICE: Yes.

Q And NRDC is aware of this?

ADM. RICE: I don't know if they are, but they will be now.

Q (Laughs.)

MS. CRAGG: I have one more question from -- (inaudible) --, but does there's any of the other bloggers on the call have additional questions before I ask the third question?

Okay, so I'll go ahead and go to the third -- it might inspire other questions.

The next one is, sir, do our allies, partners, friends also use sonar in this range and -- two parts -- are they similarly constrained? If not, is there a way we can use it to our advantage?

ADM. RICE: Is there a way we can use that -- I'm not sure I quite understand the last part of the question but to answer the first part, we do allow foreign nations to use sonar in Southern California. We allow them to use it a lot of places. As you know, or may not know, but Rim of the Pacific Exercise, RIMPAC '08 is getting ready to start this Friday out at Hawaii. That's nine pacific-rimmed nations that will be represented there. So we frequently have partner-nations operating sonar. If they are operating within

12 miles they are legally required to comply with U.S. environmental requirements. And even if they're outside, we encourage them to comply but they're not required to.

MS. CRAGG: I'm sorry if I stepped on anybody -- with regard to the last sentence, I can get back to -- (inaudible) -- and ask him to clarify it and I'll send it to Tracey.

ADM. RICE: Okay.

MS. CRAGG: Anybody else have any further questions for Admiral Rice?

Q This is Eagle One, I guess I should have asked about the Supreme Court accepting this case. Is this viewed as a positive step by the Navy? ADM. RICE: It sure is. We welcome the Supreme Court's decision to review the case. As you know the Navy's been unhappy with the district courts series of crippling restrictions that they've given us on the use of mid-frequency active sonar.

And we're just happy that the Supreme Court accepted it.

Q And have there been -- most these cases have risen -- the one's that have been most restrictive out of the Ninth Circuit in the federal district courts in Hawaii and California -- have there been similar actions brought by anybody on the East Coast of the United States?

ADM. RICE: No.

Q And one more follow-up -- on beaked whales we're talking about here, are they any kind of endangered species or is it a particular large group of these that are different --

ADM. RICE: You know, it's funny -- I'm going to get way off track here --

Q (Laughs.)

ADM. RICE: Please forgive me -- but originally we thought -- and I'll say we -- by we, I mean the scientific community, thought that beaked whales were fairly rare. You'll see, if you read, again, someone mentioned something about being on -- (inaudible) -- website, if you read their report on the Bahamans it said that following the Navy sonar exercise, you know, they've never seen beaked whales in the Bahamas again. I can tell you that prior to exercises on the -- on our AUTEC range down in the Bahamas, we see beaked whale vocalizations on almost every single hydrophone that's down there. There are a bunch of these things.

The problem is because of their diving habits, we don't see them very often. And when we do our exercises -- excuse me -- when we do our research on beaked whales we have to find them with hydrophones, then send of boat out to where the hydrophone is and wait for them to surface. They dive down, as I'm sure you may have seen literature, they dive down in excess of 1,000 meters, more than a kilometer deep and they're down there for 45 minutes holding their breath. It's absolutely amazing. And then they come up to the surface for a quick breath of air and then they're back down again. So we don't see them very much; not very much is known about them so initially we thought there weren't very many of them. But when we started looking at our hydrophones on the different ranges, we found out that they are everywhere -- they're in Hawaii,

they're all over Southern California, they're all over down in the Bahamas. It's -- and all this information obviously was shared with the researchers.

Q Okay. That was kind of my follow-up. That is the information that you're sharing with -- (inaudible).

ADM. RICE: Right. And the last exercise that we did last summer that we're getting ready to do this summer -- not an exercise, excuse me -- a research project that is sponsored by the Navy, by the Office of Naval Research, by the -- by NOAA -- but it's run by, again, scientists from all over the world, happens down on AUTECH precisely so that they can locate the beaked whales with the hydrophones before they put tags on them.

MS. CRAGG: And, sir, if I may, I have a couple additional questions -- and if any of the other bloggers have more questions, just interrupt me. One of the questions is -- and you might have kind of alluded to this, how do the district courts imposed restrictions impact the Navy's ability to train? Can you elaborate?

ADM. RICE: I can give you one hard example because most of the time when people talk about that, they talk in generalities -- and I'll give you one specific example that we found in Hawaii when the Ronald Reagan Strike Group -- and I'm sure you've seen them in the paper, they just left Hong Kong early and stranded some sailors there because they had to leave because of a tropical storm that was coming -- but on the way over they trained in Hawaii. And what they had to do because of the court imposed restrictions that said if three or more ships were using sonar within a certain range -- and I don't remember what the range was -- of each other in the presence of a surface duct, which there is almost all the time out there during this time of year, they had to reduce sonar power 50 percent.

So the commander of the screen out there was -- the screen that was protecting the carrier was faced with a decision of, do I -- and he had five ships using sonar protecting the carrier -- he was faced with the decision, do I operate my ships at 50 percent power and not train the crews very well, or do I -- and two of the ships were outside the range, so there were really three of them around the carrier -- or do I shut down one of the ships and get two crews 100 percent trained and one of the crews 0 percent trained?

And they ended up making that last choice so what they ended up having to do was kind of circulate the training. In other words, one day, A and B would operate, the next day, B and C would operate, the next day, C and A would operate -- you understand what I'm saying.

So those are the choices that we're faced with because of the court -- excuse me -- court imposed restrictions.

MS. CRAGG: And with regard to those restrictions, what are the next steps for the Navy -- rather in general, what are the next steps for the Navy with regard to the Supreme Court announcing its decision to review it?

ADM. RICE: We wait for the Supreme Court. In the mean time, we'll continue complying with the restrictions that the courts and the Ninth District have levied on us.

MS. CRAGG: Roger that.

Thank you, sir.

Now, does anybody have any follow-along questions? If not, I -- go ahead.

Q (Inaudible.)

MS. CRAGG: I can barely hear you.

ADM. RICE: If you're asking a question, we can't hear it.

MS. CRAGG: I'm sorry, sir, I do not know who is trying to ask that question.

If they can hear us, if you have a question for the admiral that you want to pose after the conversation, I'd gladly send it to Tracey to pass on to the admiral.

Sir, with that, we have time for a closing statement if you'd like to provide one.

ADM. RICE: Yeah, I will tell you that there's a lot of this stuff, the information is available on the Navy.mil/oceans website. It's a great place to go for information. We keep an updated with all the latest and greatest stuff on sonar and marine mammals.

And thanks for your time today.

MS. CRAGG: Thank you, sir, for joining us and today we had Rear Admiral Larry Rice, he's the director chief of Naval Operations Environmental Readiness Division.

Thank you, sir.

And also thank you, Tracey, for accompanying us.

Thank you for all the bloggers on the call today.

Q Thank you, Admiral.

Q Thank you.

END.